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RUEHML/AMEMBASSY MANILA 8658
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SUBJECT: NORTH KOREAN REFUGEES: FIRST STEPS INTO ROK SOCIETY

REF: A. SEOUL 1837
[1](#)B. 05 SEOUL 666
[1](#)C. SEOUL 695

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Upon arrival in the ROK, North Koreans undergo an interagency security screening process, during which the ROKG seeks to confirm refugees' bona fides and assess security risks. Thereafter, nearly all North Koreans move to the ROK's Hanawon resettlement facility, where they receive training to help them better adjust to life in the ROK. The ROK provides North Koreans with housing upon their graduation from Hanawon, and a network of government and civil society organizations help refugees adjust to life in their new communities. In light of security concerns, the ROK provides North Koreans with personal protection officers for five years after arriving in the ROK, and for longer periods for high-profile individuals. END SUMMARY.

SECURITY SCREENING PROCESS

[1](#)2. (SBU) After arrival in the ROK, most North Koreans are sent to a screening facility for a joint investigation by government agencies) National Intelligence Service (NIS), Ministry of Unification (MOU), Ministry of National Defense (MND), National Police Agency (KNPA), and Ministry of Justice (MOJ). According to Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU) Senior Research Fellow Lee Keum-soon, the security screening process served several purposes in the past, including to gather intelligence and determine if individuals were really North Korean refugees or instead North Korean spies or ethnic-Korean Chinese. As the demographics of refugees have changed, however, Lee said that the process is primarily focused on ensuring that individuals are really North Korean refugees and not ethnic Koreans from China. (NOTE: Some North Koreans) perhaps as few as ten per year) enter the ROK under NIS protection and bypass some or all of this process. END NOTE.)

13. (SBU) According to Lee, the security screening is conducted at a facility in Seoul that is disguised as a business. North Koreans live in a dormitory located on the same grounds during the screening process, and also undergo medical screening while at the facility. Lee Young-seok, Program Officer with Citizens Alliance for North Korean Human Rights, reported that the investigation is often completed in two weeks or less, but the total length of time that refugees spend at the facility depends on the availability of space at the Hanawon resettlement facility. NGOs report that, in most cases, North Koreans remain at the screening facility no longer than one month. According to NGOs and refugees, refugees are allowed to come and go from the facility once their investigation is complete and until space is available for them to enter Hanawon. One North Korean refugee who arrived in the ROK in December 2000 told us that the facility was clean and that he was able to explore the city after his two-week investigation was completed. NGOs also told us that the screening facilities were of acceptable conditions.

HANAWON

14. (SBU) Following the security screening process, most North Korean refugees enter the ROK's Hanawon resettlement facility (Refs A and B). Pak Yong-sok, Director of Hanawon's Education Planning Team, told Poloff on November 21 that Hanawon's programs were shortened from twelve to ten weeks in September 2006 to allow more North Koreans to pass through the center. Shortening the program by two weeks has not significantly reduced the amount of education trainees

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receive, Pak said. Hanawon has also initiated several community-exchange programs, including job training at a nearby polytechnical school and home-stays with South Korean families. Such programs allow Hanawon trainees to interact with South Korean society and gain real-world experience. While Hanawon officially accommodates 400 trainees at a time, the facility is currently over capacity. Hanawon plans to build additional facilities, allowing it to accommodate 2,800-3,000 trainees per year by 2009, Pak said.

15. (SBU) Several NGO and community representatives who work with North Korean refugees recommended that Hanawon's programs be shortened further or conducted part-time to allow North Koreans to receive an education on ROK society while beginning their integration into it. NK Database President Yoon Yeo-sang argued that learning about the ROK while separated from ROK society is ineffective. Hanawon's Pak acknowledged such concerns, noting that after having spent time in confined shelters or detention in third countries, refugees are anxious to start their lives in South Korea. Several civil society leaders argued that the role of Hanawon should be minimized, if not eliminated, in North Koreans resettlement, and civil society organizations should instead provide refugees with similar training in their communities. Former Hanawon Director Lee Kang-rak, now Secretary-General of the Association of Supporters for Defecting North Korean Residents, said that the ROK is currently focused on increasing the role of civil society organizations in the resettlement process, but noted that this will require increased coordination among such organizations.

ENTERING THE MAINSTREAM

16. (SBU) Upon graduation from Hanawon, the ROKG provides North Korean refugees with housing assistance, either public housing (provided through the Korean National Housing Corporation or local governments), or 10 million KRW (USD 10,000) for North Koreans to obtain their own housing. KINU's Lee reported that North Koreans who choose public housing (87 percent according to MOU) are entitled to live in public housing for an indefinite time period, and are

allocated specific amounts of space depending on the size of their household. Refugees select where they want to live, and most refugees opt to live in Seoul, even though the ROKG provides incentives to encourage refugees to live in other regions where there are greater job opportunities for refugees. NK Database's Yoon reported that until recently, North Korean youth who arrive in the ROK without their parents were cared for by ten civil society organizations designated by the ROKG, which ran group homes for them. Since the opening of the Hankyoreh School (Ref D), Yoon reported that the ROKG sends most such teenagers there, with the role of the civil society organizations now unclear.

¶17. (SBU) Because of limited public housing in Seoul, particularly with units large enough to meet the ROK's requirements, North Koreans generally live in three public housing areas in Seoul, according to NK Net President Han Ki-hong. Refugees report that they are integrated with other South Koreans in the housing complexes. Under the 1997 Protection Act, North Korean refugees are required to report changes of residence, occupation or place of employment for five years after their initial resettlement. (NOTE: All ROK residents are required to report changes in their residence under the Korean Identification (KID) system. END NOTE.)

¶18. (SBU) Numerous government agencies and NGOs play a role in the resettlement of North Korean refugees. The MOU oversees the ROKG's programs upon North Koreans' arrival in the ROK.

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The Ministry of Labor provides employment protection officers, subsidizes North Koreans' wages to employers, and recruits companies to hire North Koreans. The Ministry of Education recently started to address the special education needs of North Korean refugees, though KINU's Lee Keum-soon said its role remains relatively limited. Numerous other government ministries, including the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the Ministry of Information and Communication, provide funding for civil society programs that assist North Korean refugees.

¶19. (SBU) North Korean refugees are provided with two levels of government support when they move into the community. According to Ministry of Unification Director for Settlement Support Suh Dong-hoon, each province has officials charged with coordinating programs for North Korean refugees who oversee a network of offices in their region. Each refugee is assigned a welfare protection officer (currently 182 officers) in their locality who oversees the provision of financial, medical, and social welfare assistance as well as general counseling. These officers serve as the main liaison point between North Koreans and the ROKG.

¶10. (SBU) The 1997 Protection Act established the Association for the Support of Defecting North Korean Residents (Support Association), a coalition of more than 60 civil society organizations charged with assisting North Koreans in assimilating into ROK society. The ROKG funds these organizations to provide direct services, including educational, psychological, and legal. The Support Association also connects refugees with civilian resettlement helpers called "Doeumis" (1,200 total), two of whom are assigned to each North Koreans' household for one year, according to Support Association President Kim Il-joo and ROKG information. MOU has designated nine organizations, including the Korean Red Cross and local welfare centers, to implement the Doeumi program. Kim reported that the volunteers bring North Koreans to their new homes, show them around their new community, and help them with daily tasks such as shopping.

¶11. (SBU) Poloff visited the Hanbit Social Welfare Center, a participant in the Doeumi program, on December 4. Hanbit is located in southwest Seoul, in an area home to more than 900 refugees, the largest concentration of North Koreans in the ROK. The Center, located near public housing complexes where

many North Koreans live, occupies several areas of a building that is decorated with children's artwork. According to Lee Chul-yoo, Hanbit Director, the Center is one of six private welfare organizations commissioned by the local government to provide direct assistance to North Korean refugees in the area. Working with the Support Association, the Center's programs have continued to grow to serve the needs of the large population of North Koreans in the area. According to Lee Chun-shik, Director of Hanbit's North Korean Resettlement Center, the Center receives funding from numerous government agencies to provide psychological services, job training, and educational programs, and facilitate exchanges with South Koreans in the local community. Lee reported that the Center works closely with the Support Association, other private organizations, and local and regional government officials who support North Koreans in the community through a Coordinating Committee.

¶12. (SBU) Enlisting the support of local governments and private welfare centers is part of a move toward decentralizing MOU's programs for North Koreans, which MOU's Director Suh said is the ROKG's current programming direction. KINU's Lee said that decentralization of the programs is important, as MOU does not have the expertise to

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provide all necessary services to North Korean resettlers, but noted that interagency coordination needed to be improved.

SECURITY CONCERNS AND PHYSICAL PROTECTION

¶13. (SBU) When North Korean refugees enter their communities they are also assigned a physical protection officer through the Korean National Police Agency. According to the ROKG, approximately 700 officers have been assigned in local police stations to provide advice to North Koreans on their personal safety. These protection officers are provided to North Koreans for five years, which could be extended for individuals who face particular threats. As the number of North Koreans in the ROK has increased, the ROKG can no longer provide one-to-one protection as it had in the past. According to NK Net President Han Ki-hong, on average, one protection officer manages 40 refugees, offering limited protection to most North Koreans. In special cases, however, Han reported that the NIS provides additional protection.

¶14. (SBU) NGO leaders and refugee experts report that the major security concerns that North Koreans in the ROK face are threats from North Korean agents, brokers who helped refugees get to the ROK, and threats from other refugees. Many North Koreans also fear that public disclosure of their identities could lead the North Korean regime to punish family members who remain in the DPRK. Refugee experts and NGO practitioners agree that the threat from North Korean agents, while still real, has significantly decreased over time. Shim Sang-don, Chief Human Rights Policy Analyst at the ROK's National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), said that threats from North Korean agents were more prevalent in the past, but have decreased as the number of North Koreans in the ROK has increased and their demographics shifted away from high-level refugees.

¶15. (SBU) NHRC Deputy Director Park Byoung-soo asserted that currently, more security threats come from within the refugee community than from North Korean agents. KINU expert Lee Keum-soon said that some former government workers might face threats from other North Koreans who had negative experiences with these officials or others in similar positions in the DPRK. Lee also said that many refugees commit crimes or deceive one another in third countries as they compete for survival, and may retaliate if they encounter each other in the ROK. Lee added that threats from brokers to whom refugees owe money for helping them get to the ROK are another security concern that refugees face. One female

North Korean refugee reported that brokers often try to collect on their debts after refugees graduate from Hanawon.

¶16. (SBU) NHRC's Park said that the ROKG continues to make efforts to improve the protection officer system. The objective of the system is to provide protection to the individual, and for most North Koreans their physical protection officer served primarily as a case manager or advisor. Some individuals, however, may regard the measures as surveillance, Park said. In particular, some female refugees have felt violated by nighttime phone calls from male protection officers calling to check on them. The ROK reportedly is trying to designate female officers for the growing number of female refugees. Overall, Park said, the ROK is seeking to reduce measures that could be regarded as surveillance and better identify refugees who need additional protection so that the overall system is less intrusive. Several years ago complaints about the protection system were a major issue, but the ROKG has made substantial improvements, Park said, and has been gradually decreasing

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the role of these officers in the resettlement program.
VERSHBOW